Editorial

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Editorial Introduction for the Topical Issue “Objects Across the Traditions”

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This special issue of *Open Philosophy* is devoted to objects. While the metaphysics of objects and mereology have long been fields of rich philosophical investigation in the analytic tradition, the early twenty-first century found objects thrust to the center of a new area of inquiry in the continental tradition. I am talking about object-oriented ontology. Object-oriented ontology and its close cousin, speculative realism, have rejuvenated and recast debates between realists and anti-realists, while at the same time calling into question the many faces of constructivism that have operated for a long time as the default epistemology of continental philosophers.

The present issue regards the philosophical occasion initiated by object-oriented ontology and speculative realism as an opportunity to reflect on the numerous accounts of objects that have emerged in the philosophical tradition(s). Admittedly, the issue is not nearly as diverse—in method, tradition, or contributor—as it could be, a fact for which I assume responsibility as guest editor. Included are essays by authors working on object-oriented ontology from both theoretical and applied perspectives; examining the constructivisms of Kant, Nietzsche, and James; and exploring the object theories of Meinong, Russell, and Husserl.

Taken as a whole, the essays can be placed into two groups. The first group looks at the object theories of some of the most familiar names in philosophy. The first essay, by Rudolf Meer, articulates Kant’s theory of objects and its application in Kant’s theory of science. Instead of approaching Kantian philosophy as primarily a theory of subjectivity, Meer demonstrates that Kant’s constructivist theory of objects and objectivity is essential to his view that natural science rests upon a metaphysical foundation, which makes apodictic claims that underwrite the historical progress of knowledge. Following up on the constructivist theme, Justin Remhof brings Nietzsche and James into dialogue to reveal in their respective works a strong form of constructivism. For Remhof, both Nietzsche and James regard objects as produced by pragmatic representational practices. But, instead of landing us in a nihilistic view of the world, both thinkers’ constructivism points the way toward finding meaning in our lives and in the world. Ivory Pribram’s essay, like Remhof’s, takes a comparative approach, but this time to two giants of the analytic tradition: Meinong and Russell. Pribram shows that Russell’s theory of denotation cannot ground the ontological value of the variable unless it reconsiders some aspects of Meinong’s ontology that Russell himself contested. Pribram also draws upon Frege and Moore to buttress her arguments. The group is rounded off with a turn to Husserl’s ontology of objects by Giuseppe Armogida. Armogida, reading Husserl as a realist, concerns himself with establishing that Husserl’s account of consciousness does not foreclose the possibility that consciousness gains access to objective reality. On the contrary. Not only can human consciousness access objective reality, language—analogy especially—is capable of articulating the basic “strife,” revealed in consciousness, between the essence of things and their concrete manifestations. Armogida’s argument on this score encourages a surprising resonance between Kant, as read by Meer, and Husserl.

The second group of papers have something to say about either speculative realism or object-oriented philosophy, and each of them engages directly with the work of Graham Harman. The first of these, by Arjen

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Kleinherenbrink and Simon Gusman, offers an ontology of social objects through a comparative analysis of Sartre and Harman. Resisting the materialist reduction of social objects into supposedly more fundamental constitutive parts, the authors enlist Sartre's ideas of practico-inert being and group formation in order to fill out Harman's immaterialist ontology, which Kleinherenbrink and Gusman claim lacks a full-fledged account of social objects. In a second attempt to extend the work of Harman, Noah Roderick follows up with an essay on the concept of features and provides us with an account of what features would look like in object-oriented ontology. To do so, Roderick offers an aesthetic account of similarity (and, consequently, difference) as an emergent process of repetition. Sam Mickey then brings Harman's work into dialogue with what Mickey, following Derrida, calls the "post-deconstructive realism" of Nancy. Often seen as a formidable brand of anti-realism, Mickey argues that Nancy's deconstruction is allied with realism insofar as it effects a strident critique of phenomenological accounts of touch and embodiment. Whereas Harman often distances himself from Nancy, Mickey shows how Harman's own thinking about objects and touch can supplement Nancy's realist sympathies. The final two papers, by Drew Dalton and Gabriel Chin, put Harman's thinking to work in ethics and literary theory. Dalton begins to develop an account of objective evil before outlining a complementary account of object-oriented ethics, enlisting Schopenhauer and Spinoza along the way. Dalton considers the possibility that objects are not, as commonly believed, "morally neutral," while advancing the provocative thesis that the laws of physics can help us judge the determinate ethical value of objects. Chin concludes the issue by applying the insights of object-oriented philosophy to the literary works of Don DeLillo and Haruki Murakami. Reading the genre of magic realism through the lens of object-oriented metaphysics, argues Chin, yields a new method of formalism that cuts across established "national, cultural, and canonical boundaries."